

FRONT STEP-UPS



Stairs are almost always hard work for older adults. Some can no longer do stairs at all. Strengthening the leg muscles and teaching participants how they can more easily do the stepping-up motion will help restore some of their lost abilities. This exercise also provides balance practice for this common, everyday kind of transition and should carry over to other activities.

Benefits »

- ⦿ Practices an important everyday activity (stepping up and down stairs and curbs).
- ⦿ Develops skill and confidence to stay active in the community.
- ⦿ Requires postural control of momentum.
- ⦿ Front Step-Ups strengthen primarily hamstrings and hip extensors.
- ⦿ Side Step-Ups strengthen the hip abductors and adductors and quadriceps.

Set It Up »

Unless you plan to take turns, which is a great idea, each participant will need a small step, no higher than 4 inches (10 centimeters) tall to start. Ahead of time place the step beside a handrail or inside a walker with the brakes on for good balance support. Demonstrate first and then walk participants through the procedure so everyone is familiar with the sequence. The first few times have participants take turns with you beside them to provide individual help.

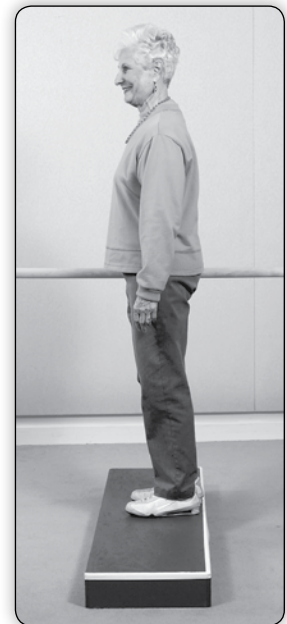
How to Do It »

The Start

- ⦿ Participants should stand tall facing the step, one hand on the handrail or both hands on the walker's side rails.
- ⦿ They place one foot on the step. Suggest that they start with their strongest leg.

The Moves

- ⦿ Cue participants to lean forward toward the stair and then step up. It's kind of one movement. Ask them if they notice how leaning forward toward the step helps get their center of gravity over the stair, making it easier to get up there. Momentum helps too. You might remind them that it's similar to Teeter-Totter Chair Stands. That is, it's one motion: Lean toward the step and when the knee is aligned over the foot on the stair, they push into the stair and step up. At the top, they may need to stop their momentum. Use these cues:
 - Place your foot on the step.
 - Lean toward the step until you feel your weight pushing through your knee and down onto your foot.
 - Pressing through the heel of the stair foot, lift your body upward and forward onto the step.



- Bring the other foot up onto the step and balance yourself there (stop the forward momentum).
- Step back down carefully, holding rail or walker. Balance again and get ready for the next step up.
- Start with just 4 to 6 step ups and progress to doing 6 to 10 step ups over time, with each leg, as tolerated.

Take It Further »

- ⦿ Increase the number of repetitions with each foot.
- ⦿ Slow down the movement.
- ⦿ Use a bigger step, such as 6 inches (15 centimeters).
- ⦿ Do Side Step-Ups. Side Step-Ups use the same techniques as Front Step-Ups, but participants step up onto the stair from standing parallel to the stair. It's a side step to a stair.
 - Place the foot on the step parallel to the edge of the step (be sure they leave room for the other foot to join it).
 - Lean over the step a bit to transfer body weight and align the knee over the ankle.
 - Step up sideways; regain balance.
 - Repeat six to eight times and progress to doing sets of 8 to 12; change legs.



Give It More Balance »

- ⦿ Lessen the balance support. Cue them to hold onto their support lightly, not tightly, or maybe their hand can just hover over the support to be used only if needed. They can choose the challenge.
- ⦿ Try new stepping patterns onto the step, with appropriate balance support.
 - Wide-Stepping Front Step-Ups: Right foot steps up wide to right; then left foot steps up wide to left. When coming back down, the feet come back together. Cue as wide, wide, narrow, narrow.
 - Side Step Up and Over: Step up with the right foot, then left. Step off to the other side with the right foot, then left.

Keep It Safe »

Always demonstrate first. Provide balance support. Be willing to hold their hands. Stress the importance of leaning toward the placed foot and using some momentum. The momentum gained from the forward lean makes stepping up much easier.